

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

HOUSING & CORPORATE ESTATE STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING

25th MARCH 2021

Attendance: Cllr. John Snell, Cllr. Grace McManus, Cllr. Aoife Flynn Kennedy, Cllr. Tommy Annesley, Aoibheann McCloy (Wicklow Travellers Group), Catherine Kenny (Dublin Simon),, Cllr. Paul O'Brien, Cllr. Mags Crean, Joe Lane (WCC), Declan Marnane (WCC), Helena Fallon (WCC) , Jackie Carroll (WCC)

Apologies: Mary Ann Parsons (PPN), Simon Blanckensee (PPN)

Item 1 Minutes of Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2021 were proposed by Cllr. Paul O'Brien and seconded by Cllr. Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

Item 2 Correspondence and Circulars

The members were advised of a Notice of Motion scheduled on agenda for Council meeting on 12th April:

"That Wicklow Co. Council formalises it's policy regarding homeowners applying for social housing supports who are in possession of either a safety order, a protection order or a barring order against their spouse/partner or co-owner. This council proposes that applicants in this situation be allowed access to social housing supports all else being in order."

The response from Housing was advised to the Committee as follows:

The National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021 sets out a plan for whole-of-government action for a more effective system to prevent and address domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The associated Action Plan for the National Strategy provides for the development of guidance for housing authorities to ensure effectiveness and consistency in responses to assist victims of domestic violence; this commitment is also reflected in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness (Action 1.8).

Circular 2 of 2017 provides guidance to local authorities in these matters and the Social Housing Assessment Regulations refer in all cases where applicants may need to apply for Social Housing Supports. Analysis (pre pandemic) indicates that, whilst the percentage of families with children that present to homeless services citing domestic violence, as a contributory factor to their homelessness, is quite low (between 5-10% of family presentations) , such presentations remain a persistent feature. It is accepted that oftentimes it is not possible, or safe, for a victim of domestic violence to return to the family home after stay in a refuge has ended. Accordingly, victims are recognised by the Housing Authority as an 'at risk' target group in relation to homelessness.

A Housing Authority may provide short term emergency housing to persons under Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988, as a homeless presentation.

If a victim of domestic violence applies for social housing support and has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, which they cannot access, they may be eligible for acceptance onto the Social Housing list on a short terms needs basis to allow them access social housing supports until ownership of the property is resolved. It is preferable for a deed of separation to be in place in such cases.

If a victim of domestic violence holds a joint local authority tenancy they may be eligible for re-entry to the social housing list - again it is preferable for a deed of separation to be in place in such cases.

All such clients are treated with compassion, encouraged to engage with other relevant agencies and alternative housing solutions/supports are given where applicable.

Accordingly, is it clear that the Council already has appropriate and relevant procedures in place to deal with such cases.

A lengthy discussion ensued, with the Committee agreeing that there was no need for policy formulation in this regard, as the matter in which it is currently dealt with is sufficient. Any policy formation could end up being prescriptive and counterproductive. This will be advised to the full Council.

The members commended the staff in their compassionate and reasonable response to date to victims of domestic violence.

Item 3 COVID 19 – and Housing Business Continuity Plan.

Housing is categorised as Essential Services, up to and including Level 5, and most services are being delivered with protocols in place.

- Council offices - Access to the building is by appointment only – where possible all business is conducted by email and phone
- Housing Construction – Whilst it is expected that all sites will shortly reopen, the impact of the closures of most sites for a substantial period may result in a 30% reduction in supply targets.
- Vulnerable provision - Self isolation houses are still being retained in the County for those in Homelessness or Traveller specific accommodation who may need to self isolate if Covid positive.

•

Item 4 Homelessness

Mid East Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2023

The members received a presentation on the Mid East Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2023. It was noted that the Plan must include, but is not limited to, the following objectives:

- The prevention of homelessness
- The reduction of homelessness in its extent or duration
- The provision of services, including accommodation, to address the needs of homeless households
- The provision of assistance under Section 10(b)(i), as necessary, to persons who were formerly homeless
- The promotion of effective co-ordination of activities proposed to be undertaken by the bodies referred to in this subsection for the purposes of addressing homelessness in the administrative area or areas concerned.

This Plan was reviewed during the Covid-19 public health emergency that required the urgent implementation of solutions to protect the most vulnerable in the community. Reviews of the Mid East Region Homelessness Action Plans between 2013 and 2020 (two Plans) identified significant challenges that were faced across the region in dealing with the increasing numbers of people and families presenting as homeless to the local authorities.

The review documents the progress of the Mid East Region in meeting the objectives of the 2018-2020 Plan over the three-year period. Key outcomes at regional level include:

- Progress on the reduction in the number of families/children in emergency accommodation
- Significant progress to date in homeless prevention and in assisting families/individuals to move from emergency accommodation to HAP
- Homeless HAP Placefinders established in Kildare, Meath and Wicklow and have played a key role during Covid-19
- Housing First tender completed and awarded in Q4 of 2019 to the Peter McVerry Trust for a 3-year period
- Significant progress in rolling out the Housing First programme with the 3-year Regional target of 64 and 14 placements achieved to date;
- Homeless Action Teams (HAT) successfully operating in each County; and
- 22 Isolation Units available in the Region in response to COVID-19 requirements
- Mid East Prisoner Protocol agreed and advanced;
- Implementation of National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) commenced

The latest review (2020) indicates that those challenges remain and are likely to continue to challenge the three local authorities over the duration of the new Plan 2021-2023.

The members thanked the team for their work on the plan and it was agreed by the Committee that the Mid East Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2023 be recommended for adoption to the full Council on 12th April 2021.

Item 5 Private Rental Inspections

Private Rental Inspections Plan

The Committee received a presentation on private rental inspections and a strategic plan for the operation of the service, and acknowledged the constraints imposed during Covid.

In the absence of actual inspections, the Section is trialling a virtual inspection plan which has been agreed with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Approximately 300 letters have been issued to landlords since the start of the year, with a checklist for them to inspect their own properties.

Age Friendly

The Committee received a presentation on recent proposals for Age Friendly Initiatives including Age Friendly Planning Guidelines and proposed schemes in the County which are being developed by Wicklow County Council. This was welcomed by the Committee.

Item 6 Traveller Accommodation

Covid 19 outbreak - The Committee was updated on the recent significant outbreak of Covid 19 in the Travelling Community in Co. Wicklow. Public Health and both Bray and Wicklow Traveller Groups were commended for their rapid response to the outbreak. It was noted that the Council provided extra sanitary/welfare facilities on Ballintesteen to assist with self isolation and off site units were offered to the family for such purpose.

Capital Programme -

Ballintesteen – 3 houses	Detailed design stage and tender documents completed, stage 3 with Dept since Nov 2020 - awaiting approval to go out to tender for a contractor in Q2
Avondale Heights, Rathdrum – 4 houses	Approval received for funding from Department, ongoing discussions with proposed tenants on draft design
Barndarrig Group Housing scheme for 2 houses	Revised stage 1 submitted to Dept for funding 21 st Dec 2020 awaiting approval – ongoing discussion with families regarding proposed change to design layout
DPG Woodview, Silverbridge Halting Site	Works due to commence on extension for disability – delay due to level 5 restrictions Awaiting approval for refurbishment to final bay

Item 7 Housing Maintenance

Normal maintenance and re-let works ongoing, with strict adherence to Covid 19 health and safety guidelines. Noted that under level 5, only emergency maintenance will take place.

Fabric Upgrade is continuing with 150 properties identified for same.

DPGs are progressing, but inspections have been necessarily impacted due to dealing with the most vulnerable householders. Clients may submit photographs detailing the works which will be acceptable to progress to approval in many cases.

Item 8 Housing Supply

The members were updated on the current status of the programme. Sites are closed, other than those on the essential list previously advised.

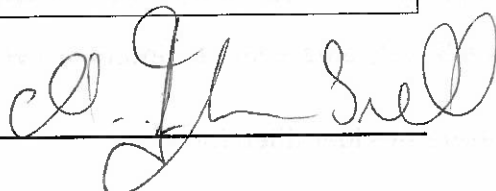
- Carnew is now complete and Merrymeeting is nearing completion.
- There is no completion date for Kilbride Court but discussions are ongoing to expedite same.
- Newtown and Rathdrum are ready to commence.
- The tender is in for Greenhill Road and Sheehan Court.
- Rockbrae House. Ongoing Engagement with Department of Defence in relation to potential purchase of c 1.48 acres (house and immediate vicinity).
- Rehills Lands - Dealing with issues in relation to access and mix of house types before finalising an overall plan for these lands. In addition a preliminary design of the bridge is being undertaken.
- Fassaroe - Scheme being developed for site at entrance, including former cycling club.

Item 9 Any Other Business.

Housing & Disability Strategy – the members were advised that the Housing and Disability Strategy was being prepared and draft would be presented to them at the next meeting

Schedule of meetings
27th May
29th July
30th September
25th November

Signed: _____



Cllr. John Snell, Cathaoirleach

Dated: _____